THE MODERN HIGH SCHOOL AS A PEOPLE'S COLLEGE

PART TWO—WHAT SHOULD OUR CHILDREN LEARN AT HIGH SCHOOL?

IN the previous article of this series we considered the nature and needs of high school children. The conclusions stated there form the first important basis for answering the question just raised. By nature what are the children ready to learn, and what do they feel a need to learn? By the side of this question we must pose another: What do parents who provide the schools want their children to learn, and what needs for learning in the lives of their children can be foreseen and justified? The joining together of answers to these two double-headed questions will constitute an answer to the larger question used as a caption above.

The people in their collective capacity establish and carry on schools as a means of promoting growth in their children along desired lines. Of themselves the high schools are not an end of society. Their worth is measured by their results in the lives of children who are growing into adults. Indeed, any changes or innovations or improvements in the schools are important only to the extent that they improve children—make them better able and willing to do what they must do during their adult lives.

In trying to answer the question proposed above, the writer sets himself the task of speaking in plain language, clear of technical expressions, hoping to be of service to those in charge of the schools, to college students preparing to teach, and to thinking parents and citizens. There is great need for clear expression of aims of education for the guidance of all three groups.

The plan of this article is to offer three or four general lines of reasoning which should guide in shaping the aims of the schools, then attempt some interpretation of present efforts and progress, with final conclusions stated in rather definite form for their value as a basis for this series of discussions.

I. Education for Everybody

Whatever else may be said, it is certain that we are committed in this country to the schools as our hope of a continually improved civilization. Universal education has become our way of life. As one writer expressed it in the title of a book recently, schools have been set up as "The American Road to Culture." On the face of it we are pinning our faith to mass education, and we are interested in selection and specialization during the high school period only as they fit into the larger undertaking of educating all the children. In this sense the high schools may be truly thought of as the "people's colleges."

In connection with this notion of popular and universal education at the high school level, three important questions arise as to aims of education and plans for carrying out the the vast undertaking:

1. As a matter of fact, are we really expecting to educate all children for the collective good that will accrue from their education, or do we still hold to the older doctrine of making individual opportunities for those who can and will take them, without any sincere hope of educating all? Do we just try to keep the door open for all as far as they will go and make the going enough harder at each step to turn back a sizable proportion of the total? Our philosophers of education would subscribe to a plan of education for all as a matter of national welfare, but myriads of parents and teachers probably still do not see beyond the individuals who distinguish themselves by rising above difficulties and getting on in education, thus selecting themselves for its benefits. There is much room for doubt as to whether our practices are

making the schools open to all, if total results are to be the measure. Bagley says:

> American education has always leaned strongly toward individualism; and in part to extreme localism in support and control of public schools. The individual has, so to speak, overshadowed the welfare of the social group as a whole. The fine phrase, "Equality of educational opportunity," has usually meant opportunity to "get ahead"—of others. The notion of organized education as an agency of social welfare and social progress has had far less influence in getting for education either public funds or private donations than has the slogan, "Give every boy and girl a chance."

2. Are we educating for the past, present, or future? To ask this question sensibly eliminates the first possibility. Yet, how much of all that goes on in the schools can be justified only by tradition, now become time-honored and accepted? The present assumes overwhelming importance in all child-centered learning. Children live in a complex, throbbing world, remade in a century of industrial revolution, with the tempo of things stepped up in dizzying fashion. The present is vital and absorbing. Present happenings connect grippingly with child nature and with every consideration of actual experience, meanings, interests, and felt needs. But change is so rapid and the need for new adjustments so imminent at any given time that we can not be content with a static conception of education. Really we must connect the present with a period twenty or thirty or more years ahead if children are to receive greatest benefits from their schooling. From every consideration based upon children themselves schools should be centered in the present; from the standpoint of a continuing society there should be definite pointing to the future. Both demands are in contrast to the forces of tradition which look backward and decree that what was good for us when we were children should suffice for the present generation of school children.

3. To be more specific, we must ask ourselves squarely the question: What sort of high school education is best for the machine age that already dominates in large measure the lives of a majority of Americans? Certainly the answer is not that which was considered proper for the period when education was Webster's speller and McGuffey's readers, nor even that of the time when Harvey's grammars and Ray's arithmetic and Barnes's histories set the standards.

II. Traditions Do Change

Elementary schools were set up in this country to teach fundamental skills; high schools were to bring about mental training and serve a preparatory step to the professions. It was supposed that the high-school pupil who worked hard enough at some kind of difficult subject matter, as a dead foreign language or higher mathematics, would receive the benefits of a trained mind and also assured success in professional school. Those who tried high school and did not succeed would become workers of another kind at ordinary tasks of life. This conception, so easy of administration, was so well perpetuated by the schoolmasters that it has taken nearly two centuries since Ben Franklin first spoke out against it to make much headway toward a changed line-up. The attempt to establish high schools where most children would attend throughout the course has been so slow that many communities still do not have such schools.

Tradition argues that subject matter worked at consistently in recognized arrangements is a sufficient end for high schools to reach. By successful accomplishments in fixed subject matter the pupil will realize mental discipline, gain entrance and assurance of success at college, and at the same time gain valuable training for citizenship duties and all life demands. These values, attained in so simple a manner, have seemed too good to be surrendered to mere passing demands for change; many high schools are still shaped by them, by and large, as dominating ends. The high schools are supported by parents who have always believed in such values and they are

taught by teachers who themselves went through high schools and colleges which were dominated by the same conception. Change has not come easily in such a set-up.

But evidence multiplies that there is not the abundant transfer of training once supposed. Then there are many pupils who simply can not or will not do the abstract and difficult subjects up to accepted standard and one or more of several things must happen: they have to drop out of school because they can not meet standards; the standards have to be lowered so they can pass; or new subject matter not so exacting is substituted for the time-honored material. Generally the latter two things have happened, and there is a general shaking of heads among the older generation that the high schools are not what they used to be. College professors who teach their subjects in the good old way are the most vigorous head-shakers, but they are followed most closely by high-school teachers who have been on the job for ten years or longer.

Since the turn of the century, many people engaged in education have developed a kind of reasoning which might be called the argument of "dollar diplomacy" for education. They prove the worth of education by its money value, generally arrived at on the basis of crude averages of earnings of educated persons when compared with earnings of uneducated, without considering either that the qualities which would persist in getting an education in the face of obstacles are the same ones which would guarantee success in making a living or that many persons succeed in making money who do not have even a high-school education. Close akin to the money-value argument are the ones for ease-of-life and social-distinction advantages. In the period of national depression and unemployment on a large scale we have seen the validity of all such distinctions disappear in such wholesale fashion that we now know their fallacies and they are not offered by people who really think.

After all, what are the eternal values of high-school education? We can be pretty sure that they are not a result of mental training which fits the conception that dominated secondary education in America until recently; not college entrance and guarantees of college success as the result of rigid high school discipline; not even greater earning value, or a more secure and easier station in life, or a better social position. The lasting values must be those which can be worked for by all children, which have to do with all living, which children can attain singly and in groups, which each can reach according to his individual ability, and which will produce a proper human return on the investment of money and effort. The following from a well-known educator is probably as good a sample as any: "consideration, coöperation, cheerfulness, fidelity to duty and to trust, courage and perseverance in the face of disappointment, aggressive effort toward doing the task that one's hand finds to do and doing it as well as one can, loyalty to friends and family and those for whom one is responsible, a sense of fact and a willingness to face facts, clear and honest thinking."

III. Restating the Aims of Education

About twenty years ago leaders in education made a concerted attempt to redirect the high schools out of the traditional channels just pointed out. Their efforts culminated in two important results which it is well to mention here. First, a statement of the main purposes of secondary education was agreed upon which added to accepted skills and knowledges the six social ideals of health, home membership, vocation, citizenship, use of leisure, and ethical character as desirable outcomes. Second, the junior high school as an organization for grades seven, eight, and nine was recommended. Both proposals have had far-reaching effects in education and may be

thought of as having most to do with the breaking of the older traditions of mental discipline, college entrance demands, and straight-jacket organization in the high schools.

During more recent years there have been many studies of school programs and statements of aims by different school units and systems, some of them state-wide. It has become the accepted thing in such studies to make a statement of aims of education. In the recent curriculum study in Virginia aims appear which on the face of things are somewhat like other typical lists. We shall discuss the Virginia grouping of aims at a later point.

Some of the studies of aims are so elaborately done and the analyses run into such detailed length that it is hardly conceivable that they can be used in any practical manner. Since the work of the schools must be carried on by teachers who direct learning and by pupils who learn, and since neither pupils nor teachers will do anything about a multiple list of thousands of aims stated by some group of theorists, we may as well think of such attempts as merely occupying shelf room, with possible use by some other group of theorists working on another such list.

Any statement of aims should contribute to the direction of popular education and be a means of coördinating effort in the schools. Aims should be stated in simple, understandable language and should be in a form usable by teachers who are the adult representatives of society in the schools. The teacher understands the aims of society because she is an adult at the same time she is an employed teacher. She must understand aims before she can do the work of the schools. In order to understand aims the teacher should have had a part in stating them and should study them regularly with fellow teachers and leaders of the school system. A good statement of aims should be valuable in the hands of the teacher as a guide and check list of plans and activities and outcomes of regular efforts of teachers and pupils.

IV. Adult Aims and Children's Purposes

At this point comes the chief difficulty in stating the aims of education. Adult aims can become effective only through the learning efforts of children. If learning efforts are directed by aims which are purely adult in nature, the children would probably get along just as well by a direct attack upon fixed bodies of subject matter in the time-honored way. There must be some connection between children and the aims of society. The teacher is that connecting link.

How is the teacher to serve children as they are in order to help them become what society collectively desires? This is the most difficult question in all education. To accomplish this end is the very essence of all good teaching. In dealing with aims it is plainly the work of the teacher to use the children's abilities, experiences, interests, and felt needs to form purposes strong enough to carry into learning-activities which shape young lives. These learning-activities—oft repeated, long sustained, ever varied—will finally result in the growth society wants. The teacher acts as an interpreter of society and a co-ordinator of pupil purposes, always directing the two to a common end. Children do what they can, and are ready to do, and grow by so doing as society wishes. The ends of both adults and children are gained under good teaching because children are so adaptable and versatile and because adult demands are more nearly approximate than absolute.

In this connection, another difficulty causes much confusion. *Are pupil needs comprehensive in scope and compatible with adult aims to the extent that they may be made basic to a whole school program?* The answer is found in the teacher who keenly discerns children's leads and can direct them into learning activities; who

suggests as well as takes suggestions from pupils; who presents learning materials of worth as well as judges the offerings of children; who discovers needs from one activity which carry over into another; who studies children as individuals and adapts to them personally; who encourages, inspires, leads, persuades, approves and disapproves, sees and appears not to see—in short, who completely understands and loves and works with children. Her purposes, based upon adult aims, are made to blend completely with their life-found needs.

The fine art of teaching consists quite as much in causing youngsters to feel need as in helping them to express felt needs. Any other conception would make the education of immature children dependent upon their own whims and moods and fancies. If experiences have been inadequate for the work at hand, it is the office of the teacher to set up experiences to supply the shortage. If a skill is needed, the teacher is there to help the child recognize the need of skill and to direct the learning of the skill as needed. There is no excuse for skimpy, vapid, sentimental thinking at this point. Teachers still have the definite responsibility of teaching! They do not have to stand around on tiptoe waiting for some little fellow to set off the fireworks of learning!

Since schools are made up of children who vary greatly in ability, aims must be comprehensive enough at any year-level to include what may be expected of all. The very weak will have all they can do and the very strong will not exhaust all the possibilities. They will do many things together and learn from each other. The strong pupils may excel in things intellectual, but the slower type may be just as helpful and dependable in the group and contribute what they are able. Aims are elastic. Teachers translate them into learning situations which are built up from children's experiences and interests and are valuable to pupils of differing abilities.

Aims should always be stated in terms of children's attainments. This makes them more usable and increases their guidance values for teachers. When children have gained the abilities, knowledges, and attitudes desired by adults they will take the places appropriate to their development and carry on in the world of adult affairs. School attainments will translate into the larger objectives which society collectively sets as the common good because aims have directed their lives toward that end.

V. The Virginia Statement of Aims

Aims as stated in Virginia's new course of study are grouped into attitudes, generalizations, and abilities. These are in the main skills of rather definite nature, knowledge and information pretty well digested and applied by learners, and feelings about matters of some concern in daily living. All are stated in terms of pupil growth. Except for a tendency to over-wordiness and too much detail, the list is probably well conceived and as usable as any now in print.

It is intended that the Virginia aims be used constantly to guide the teacher in planning and the aims are constantly referred to in the course of study. The use of selected subject matter on a large scale and the experiences of the children should fit in well with the statement of aims. The list should prove for the teacher an adequate check against the accomplishments of the children.

Emphasis in the use of the Virginia aims seems to be upon careful planning with pupils, systematic guidance in the formation of purposes by pupils, active teaching in opening up learning activities and clearing up difficult points, thinking on the part of pupils, and wide use of reference materials. Though the aims may appear quite indefinite and baffling to poorly trained or traditionally trained teachers, they should prove a great help to ambitions, well-educated, versatile teachers.

It would seem that a reasonable application of the Virginia aims and their faithful use in the way intended would result in even a wider grasp of worthwhile subject matter. Certainly they should stimulate a richer, more enjoyable, more meaningful learning experience.

VI. Conclusions

1. Aims represent the ends to be achieved in the lives of children. They are a directing, driving force toward those ends.

2. Aims are stated by philosophers, arranged in usable form and adapted to school purposes by teachers, and accomplished by pupils through learning efforts.

3. Aims must be attained actively by children through their learning experiences in situations that have meaning. They can not be imposed.

4. Aims are peculiar to individuals and situations. They are adapted to the situation by teachers and personally adopted as learning purposes by pupils.

5. Aims are dynamic and changing. They must be revised from time to time.

6. Aims provide no solutions to educational problems; they should furnish guidance in the thinking called for in solutions.

7. Aims should be stated in plain, simple English for the use of all who are concerned with the educational undertaking.

8. Aims for the use of high-school teachers should take into consideration the nature and needs of adolescent children.

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MODIFICATIONS IN HOME-READING REQUIREMENTS SINCE 1900

FORMAL instruction in English was first required at Harvard, and then only as late as the last quarter of the past century. At that time, the faculty decided that many of the candidates presenting themselves for admission to the institution were so poorly equipped in their ability to read and to write intelligently that they could not be considered as adequately prepared to pursue a higher education. Consequently, the masters in 1865 decreed that, thereafter, any prospective student of Harvard must give a satisfactory demonstration of his ability to read aloud, though they did not specify any particular writing from which the reading was to be done. Five years later, we find, however, that entrants were required specifically to have studied either *Comus* or *Julius Cæsar*. By 1874, the entrance examinations included questions on spelling, punctuation, and handwriting, and allowed a choice in reading of one of the following classics: *The Tempest, Julius Caesar, The Merchant of Venice, The Vicar of Wakefield, Ivanhoe, The Lay of the Last Minstrel.*

Following the example of Harvard, other colleges laid down definite requirements in knowledge of the classics as prerequisite to admission to baccalaureate study. The high schools of the day, existing largely for the purpose of college preparation, endeavored to offer instruction in all the classics required. Most of them followed the practice of distributing these classics throughout the three or four years of high school. There was no consistent scheme followed as to the placement of specific classics. Indeed, any one book might appear in any one of the ninth, tenth, eleventh, or twelfth years.

However, complaint came from the high schools that, with the wide diversity of requirements for entrance into many colleges, it was impossible to organize an adequate course of study. As a result of this protest, there was formed the National Conference on Uniform Entrance Requirements, with the consequent standardization of literature courses in secondary schools. The National Education Association's Committee on College Entrance Requirements, in its report published in 1899, laid out a purely formal course of study, based on the theory of formal discipline. The recommended list for